

CONVOLUTED

Convoluted. Such is life in El Salvador.

It is good to be home again, after much wandering, welcomed by housemates, friends, colleagues, one of my turtles . . . but the "national reality" is not welcoming. It seems even less hopeful than when I left, if that is possible. It doesn't inspire a report, or an update.

In years past, it seemed that high-level functionaries could commit no error or crime worthy of arrest, let alone trial and conviction. Not so much innocence, but impunity, reigned at upper levels of society. While this is still too true for too many, times have changed, and many are falling, including former presidents of the republic. Politicians and functionaries seem to be delighting in taking turns sending each other to jail. Trust is indeed a rare quality. Almost all are suspect.

Violence is up and down, mostly up--often way up, though homicide rates have moderated somewhat in the past month or two. Yesterday I saw 2 lists of the most violent and dangerous countries in the world. In one list, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala were all in the top 5. In the other, no Latin American country made the top 10. Even violence is open to interpretation, it seems.

For day-to-day updates, I can't beat "Tim's El Salvador blog", a USA'n Lutheran lawyer's perspective, so I'll refer you to his analyses for a very balanced and helpful explanation and analysis of some of the ins and outs of Salvadoran reality over the past weeks.

Former Attorney General freed on bail, actress and human rights activist is not:

<http://luterano.blogspot.com/2016/09/former-attorney-general-freed-on-bail.html>

Former President Mauricio Funes granted asylum in Nicaragua:

<http://luterano.blogspot.com/2016/09/mauricio-funes-granted-asylum-in.html>

Citizen views of crime and policing: http://luterano.blogspot.com/2016/09/citizen-views-of-crime-and-policing_2.html

A tangled story of corruption: <http://luterano.blogspot.com/2016/09/a-tangled-story-of-corruption.html>

They disappear every day: <http://luterano.blogspot.com/2016/08/they-disappear-every-day.html>

One might wonder what there is to live for in such a country, what keeps anyone here, what draws one to such a place.

I continue to be impressed--amazed--by the dedication and commitment of colleagues to being peace-makers, promoting dialogue and reconciliation, in and in spite of a very adverse, even threatening context. These include the persistent, though smaller, team of IPAZ--(Ecumenical) Pastoral Initiative for Life and Peace, of which several members have been arrested, imprisoned, interrogated and investigated in recent months, their churches searched, for their pastoral work with the nation's youth and prison inmates. The Lutheran pastoral team also serves faithfully in the midst of this chaos, often caught in the

middle, ministering to and in the midst of perpetrators, victims and "security" authorities and agents. The realities lived, analyzed and addressed by these folk make ecclesiastical, faith and life issues in saner, safer countries seem rather superficial by contrast.

Also, the cultural spirit of the Salvadoran people is indomitable. Last weekend, 256 of the country's 262 municipalities came together to put on an intense 2-day show for the nation--"Pueblos Vivos" (Living Peoples / Towns) -- impressing me and thousands of fair-attendees with their spirit, talents, creativity, ingenuity, energy, spontaneity and graciousness. Culinary arts, music, dance, humour, all manner of plastic arts and sculpture were on display for our appreciation and purchase. I could have spent an entire week immersed in such an atmosphere, discovering treasures and witnessing the best of humanity from across this tiny but intense country . . . all without leaving CIFCO, the fairgrounds.

Today El Salvador celebrated "Independence Day"-- 195 years, more of dependence and manipulation than independence, as most are too aware. In spite of their history of oppression, the Salvadoran people rise above it to celebrate their nation and each other, with great flair and spirit. Faith and hope, in God if not in all humanity, remain strong.

Together we forge ahead, inspired and guided by our God of life and liberation.

Paz,

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